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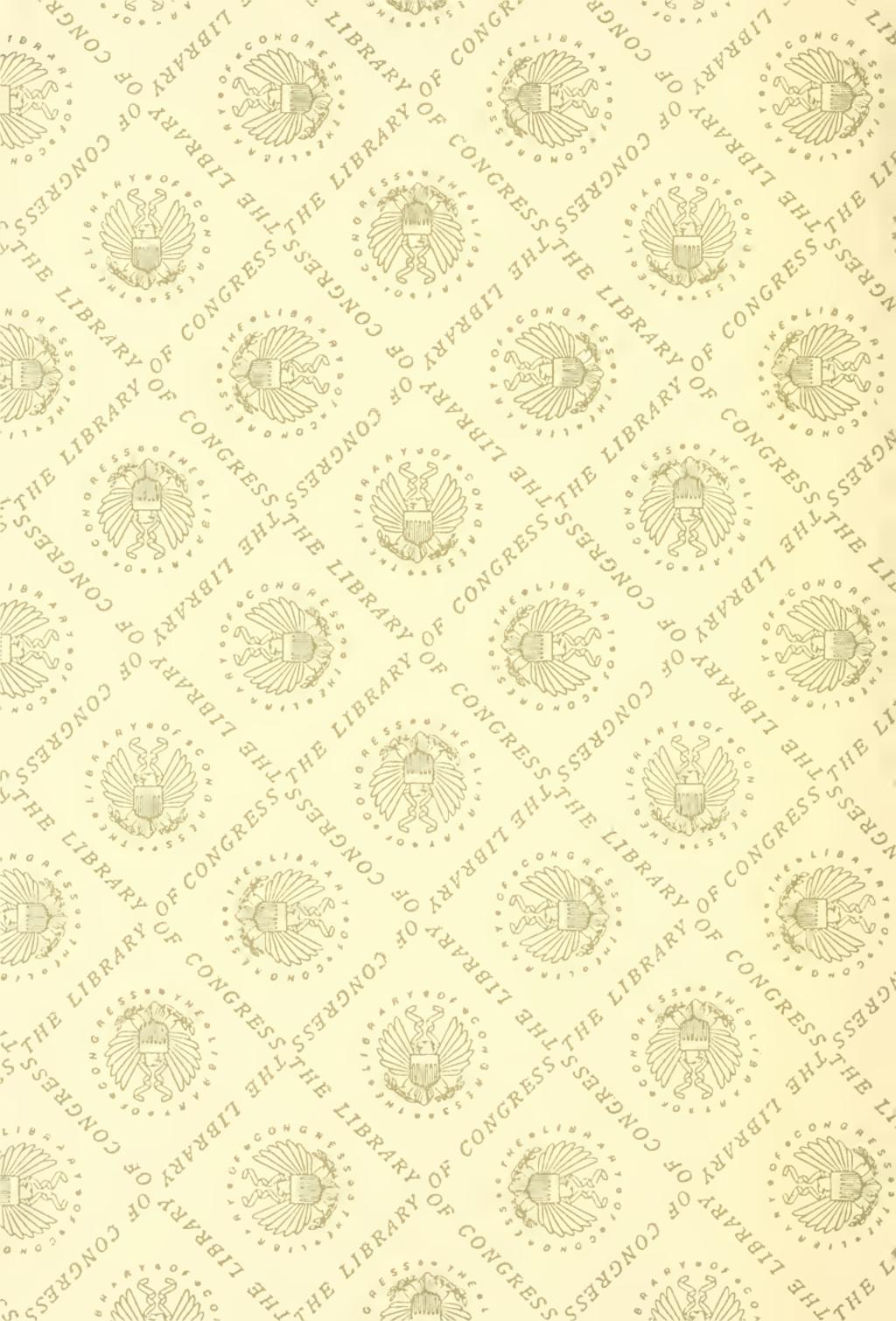
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SONNETS AND LYRICS

SONNETS
AND LYRICS
BY
NANCY K. FOSTER



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PAUL ELDER AND COMPANY
SAN FRANCISCO

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1917

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TO
MY BROTHER ERNEST

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SONNETS AND LYRICS

MY TRAIL

YOUR trail may carry you far away,
To the line of the snowy peak;
You may follow the wake of the fir-tree's
song,
But farther, still farther I seek.

You may wander the forests primeval,
Lured by the eagle's call,
Or wait for the desert's wooing—
My trail outreaches them all!

I doubt if you find it by searching
Howsoever far you climb:
The inn at the end is a constant heart,
The trail is a man's lifetime.

THE MOJAVE

GR^EA^T Desert, mighty brother to the Sea!
Thy burning sands in silver waves
unrolled,
Thy distances ablaze with red and gold.
Huge solitude! Lone Western mystery!
For comrade the wide sky bends lovingly,
By day encircling thee with azure fold—
A flawless blue—or flaming tints more bold;
By night lending her stars for company.
Unmeasured, vast, sublime, thou surely art!
What healing in thy pure mesmeric air!
Yet, desolate as some large human heart,
That, still unclaimed, unsought, is waste and bare;
Impervious to joy or grief's deep smart,
Waiting the touch of Love, thou liest there!

REMEMBRANCE

ACROSS the hills to the windy spaces,
Up where the cañon turns from the sea,
There in the lush green, glowing places,
Where scarlet and gold hold revelry,

Once came a day when the lark's song called to
me,
Over the mesa of mist and dew:
The stifled sob broke into weeping,
The dead heart woke to the thought of you.

LA FRANCE ROSES

ROSES of France, how beautiful you are!
Warm is your color as the glowing cheek
Of my beloved. Vainly would I seek
'Mongst India's webs your texture to compare.
Opulent hearts, large, generous, and rare,
Radiant La France! Not fragile, slender,
sleek,
As Gold of Ophir or Safrano meek—
Perchance of long ago Love's chosen flower!
Gazing on you, old days of war and might,
Of prowess, chivalry, in sunny France,
Of courts of Love, gay tournament and dance
Return once more. Chansons and virelay
To lady sung by troubadour or knight
Are in your honeyed scent breathed forth alway!

THOUGHTS IN THE CAMPAGNA

ALONG the Appian Road we went to-day,
Strewn with the precious fragments of the
past—

Fragments of Rome! that time and storm
outlast.

Mile after mile, the champaign stretched away,
'Broidered with daisies springing 'midst decay;
The Alban hills faint, wistful shadows cast;
Spectres of glory vanquished, tragic, vast,
Loomed from old archways and tall towers gray.

Dreaming I fall, and other mountains see,
Nobler than any Italy may show,
Fold upon fold upcrowd in majesty,
Pale amber lights, deep purples all aglow!
And in my ears an ageless melody—
The broad Pacific eloquently slow.

A CALIFORNIA GARDEN

WHAT so rare as this garden small?
White oleanders, magnolias fair,
Swinging pale censers upon the air,
All in the glory of bloom!
Humming-birds wooing hibiscus-flower,
Myriad blossoms in tangled bower,
Where sunbeams quiver and swoon!

Nothing so rare as this garden small.
Date palm and cactus, acacia old,
Curling its fingers, fold upon fold,
All of the long afternoon.
Breeze calling breeze in the rosewood trees,
Whose filmy, delicate, trembling leaves
Make slender bars for the moon!

A FOOT-HILL SONG

WHEN from mountain base rises in soft waves of light,
The mist-silvered sage with its long fingers white,
And the honey-bee revels in seas of new sweet,
To fall thinking of you, it is meet, it is meet!

When the quail leaves his ambush with flutter and stir,
And the humming-bird circles and darts with low whirr,
When the butterfly pauses to rest her long mile,
To fall thinking of you is worth while, is worth while!

When the mimulus bell grows in clusters apace,
And the yucca's tall taper burns white in one's face,
When the scents from the foot-hills blow balsam and rest,
To fall thinking of you is the best, is the best!

A STORM IN THE SIERRA MADRE

STARTLED, surprised, I gaze in wonderment.
The gracious heavens that all the constant
year
Pour benison serene, are charged with fear:
I wait and watch—the black clouds spread a
tent,
Smothering, confined. With outlines blurred
and rent,
Whipped by the wind, the mountains
disappear—
Lost in the mist—tempestuous as Lear
Yon stately peak!—the range magnificent!
It clears: again the bright placidity,
Blue quietness, the sky's habitual blue;
“Old Baldy” lets his cloud-wrought visor fall;
While, shot by distant sunbeams through and
through,
The prism-heights, emerald, chalcedony,
An instant flame—a New Jerusalem wall!

CANOPUS*

BLUE Wonder-star! so near the horizon's rim;
Chaste Spirit of these Southern winter skies!
Largess of light for timid human eyes
Thy jewelled variance! Truly sight grows dim,
As swift as thought thy flashing colors skim
The spectrum o'er—when lo! thy spark wanes,
dies,
Then, sudden, breaks in magical surprise,
Outrivaling thy peer, the Dog-star grim.
Long ages past 'tis said the Persian's knee,
On lonely plain and rugged mountain-wall,
In breathless adoration bowed to thee:
To-day we worship gold, land, houses—all—
Tinsel and gaud before thy radiancy!
Fool's-fire to lure and dazzle till we fall!

*The brightest star but one in the heavens. It is not visible in the northern latitudes, but conspicuous in California and in Florida in the winter.

SPRING IN THE HILLS

UPLAND and meadow, orchard-slope and
dale,
Are filled with moving shapes of living
green;
They flee before my eyes from morn till eve,
In floating, shimmering robes of mystic sheen.

I must forget it is the earth I tread,
When looking through this glade of willow
screen;
For, yonder, Dian bends her graceful head;
Against the oak, I see Endymion lean!

And all night long in rout of minstrelsy,
Playing their pipes while mountain brooklets
sing,
Led by young Bacchus, clad in leafy coat,
Come the wild Maenads, shouting, "It is
Spring!"

MATILJA POPPIES

PETALS pellucid and fragile,
Disks spun with threads of the sun,
Eerie and far-straying sprites,
Out of the wild cañon come!

Jewels for Dian, the stately,
As to the chase she will hie;
No earth-born maiden dare wear ye,
Lest, fading, straightway ye die!

CHEROKEE ROSES

ROSES, starry roses, pure and still and white,
Resurrection roses! for the Easter night.

Roses, starry roses, holy, reverent flowers,
Fairest for an offering to this Christ of ours.

Roses, starry roses, tell the Man of Thorns,
That He has our homage, not our slights and
scorns.

Roses, starry roses, whisper God above,
That we most adore Him for His Gift of Love.

A SEA SONG

OUT of the storm and the winds wild and
cold,
Out of the mist and the moon's path of
gold,
Out of the depth of the wave's emerald fold,
My soul goeth forth to thee!

Caught in the arms of the feathery spray,
Wrapt in a robe of the sun's lilac ray,
In the song the sea sings on the gray beach
to-day,
Thy soul returneth to me!

BY THE PACIFIC

I.—TWILIGHT

FOG-WINGS enfold,
But not before strange beauties fill the
space

Of quiet water in the harbor-nest,
Gold and vermillion, with a gift of rest,
Making a holy-ground—this little place!

Fog-wings enfold,
But not before the mighty deep has laid,
As guerdon on the patient shore's calm breast,
Kisses of peace—soft from the wave's white
crest,
As though the yearning, restless waters prayed.

Fog-wings enfold,
But not before the mountains meet the sea,
Mist of the peak with mist of headland—one—
Wrapt, withdrawn, in pearly unison,
Ere night and darkness win the mastery.

II.—NOCTURNE

SILENCE! Then the low music comes,
The throbbing music of the slow night-
tide
Up through the fog and mist.
List! Ah, list!
Hear the tall breakers ride
Landward in stately pride;
While leagues beyond sleeps the dark sea,
Tranquilly! tranquilly!
Where sea and sky are one,
Sleeps the dark sea!

SEA MIST

WHO knows if the Sea love the Mountain well?

All day long doth he take his way,
Shimmering, shining, boastful, free,
Ever proud is the stately sea!
For the distant mountain, what cares he?
But when in the midnight, the long moonbeams fall

In whitened splendor across the wall
Of the rugged mountain, sad and tall,
Then doth the Sea send a pearly zone
To engirdle the waist of the mountain lone—
A lover's pledge from the stately sea
To the distant mountain, fair is she!

A STORMY NIGHT BY THE PACIFIC

TO-NIGHT there comes a calling of the sea;
 Importunate and wild the breakers moan,
 Weaving the tireless shuttle of the foam,
Tossing the dulse and kelp unceasingly.
Dark, dark, unsolvable the mystery
Of beach, of starless sky and headland lone;
Tumultuous, throbbing Night! peace there is
 none,
Till morning quickeneth the sullen lea,
Ushering in the blue October day,
Along the golden marshes warm and still,
Across the harbor, where the schooners lay
Asleep within the shadow of the hill,
That overlooks the tranquil, dreaming bay,
Where, hour by hour, the sea-birds play at will.

THE TRUANT POET

WEARY in heart and brain, a Poet cried,
“What joy or rest doth all my labor
bring,
To the great world that strives and toils
outside?
When dare they stay to hear a Poet sing?”
He fell asleep, and in great agony,
Dreaming, he stood upon an arid plain,
Where pale and weary faces he could see,
And hear sad voices calling him in vain.
From out the midst there spake a woman fair,
“O Poet dear, return unto the skies,
Or we shall die for lack of that sweet air,
Which keeps alive the soul that pants and
dies!”
Back to Parnassus’ height the Poet came,
Begging the gods their truant child to claim!

CHAUCER

FROM Browning's greatness in his "Ring and Book,"

Or from the pages where sad Arnold cries
Unto his lonely soul that pants and dies
So near the Eternal Fount, I turn and look
To thee, hale Singer, whom I had forsook
For these. Blithe Chaucer! Nought thy song
denies

Of that which strengthens, gladdens, satisfies!
Kneeling, I quaff as at a mountain-brook,
One sparkling draught, that makes the slow
heart beat
With sympathetic love to fellow men;
The hand, once loth, now quickly turns to greet;
A charm hold grass and sky beyond my ken,
The whole world has grown young and fresh
and sweet,
And every daisy-disk gleams forth a gem.

TO TENNYSON

TO-DAY, they lay thee down to rest,
Thou valiant bard of lyric song,
Who knew'st so well the worth of speech,
Skilled master in our Saxon tongue!

To elevate the human heart,
Till passion grew a holy thing,
Obedient unto highest Law,
Was thy peculiar ministering.

How strong, yet tender are thy men!
How fair is woman in thine eyes!
Our little children fall asleep,
Hushed by thy winsome lullabies.

And to the doubting, restless soul,
Unraveling life's deep mystery,
A steady light forever gleams
From out thy noble Elegy.

October 12, 1892

AFTER HEARING LISZT'S "LIEBESTRAUM"

SO OFT my heart had tried love's song to sing,
So oft to utter through some charmed word
Your soul's response—the passion all
unheard

Yet plainer far than speech, your eyes would
fling

To quickly catch my thought and quickly bring,
My answering heart to yours. Ever deterred!
Mute, lame, withheld, like some wild, fettered
bird,

Impotent was the senses' offering!
Never until I heard this Master's tone;
The faultless, magic note, the flawless bars,
Where matchless melody alone doth moan,
With tenderness that reaches to the stars,
And earthly love doth heavenly love become,
Found I expression meet—here, nothing mars!

YSAYE

YOU ask me then, “What made the artist great?

How with that slender bow the hearts of men

He moved and thrilled and swayed beyond their ken?

Which of the gods endowed him? By what fate Those lifeless strings burst forth articulate—

Now with the moan of sea on shore again,

Or sob of child, or holy saints’ amen,

Or, yet, love’s yearning, deep, impassionate?”

Talent one may define, her essence tell—

This is within the bound and sceptre’s right

Of that vast Land of Words—the poet’s realm.

If from the womb of thought great genius come,

Circled by holy fire and aureole light,

Affrighted, Speech shrinks backward, helpless, dumb!

CONFSSION

FOR years I've fought it, love! Here, now,
to-night,

Within the quiet of the empty room,
Alone, except for company—the moon,
Who knows my secret these long silent years,
Here, christened by swift-coursing, burning
tears,

I'll open bare this heart just made to beat
For thee! That woman's, yonder, warms at
Song,

Or, at Humanity's eternal wrong;
But I, possessing powers, rich, wide, complete,
Fling all away to lie before thy feet!

How strange it is that God would dare allow
The years to pass with neither sign nor vow,
From me to thee, from thee to me, apart?

Yet still permit the falling of hot tears;
Until the heart disclosed to thee to-night,
Is burnt and parched and scathed from the
fight,

So marred, so broken, waiting the slow years
'Tis scarcely worth the proffering e'er I go—
In other worlds, perchance, we both shall know.

THE COWARD

BECAUSE of one poor little wound, my Heart,
Thou comest back to me,
Back to emptiness and strife,
Who hast shared his royal life?

The pain, I know, is sore, the thrust was deep,
But, Heart, proud Heart, wouldst' have him
know we weep?

Forth to thy queenly state! Shame 'twould be,
To have a woman's love like craven flee,
Because of one poor little wound, my Heart.

WASTE

NO WITHERED flower that all the day
Its gay perfume had flung,
Now first to this, and then to that,
Wild, foolish bird which sung.

No ancient bell that once had sent
Fair melodies afloat;
But now is sadly jangled,
And plays a doleful note—

Not such as these—was the fresh love
That fell across his way;
It was a first surrender,
Rebuffed by common clay.

I HAD A DREAM

I HAD a dream, my dear,
Somewhere, we sat alone.
The place? It matters not.
The time? I've quite forgot.
The whole is vague and gone—
One thing remains, how clear!
My timid hand found way,
Into your palm to stray.

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

WHO would have thought that skies could
warmer be
Than those last year above the pepper
tree?
And yet to-day there gleams a deeper blue,
As though the very saints were peering through,
Who would have thought?

Who would have thought the fields could greener
grow,
That this year's nest a sweeter song could know?
And yet to-day no blade but is more fair,
The lark's note breaks pure crystal on the air,
Who would have thought?

Who would have thought your love could surer
tell
Its tenderness and strength, my heart knows
well,
And yet to-day, there burns a brighter flame,
The old love boasts a newer, richer name,
Who would have thought?

ON THE CLIFFS

WHAT have we done with you, beautiful
Years?

Given you laughter and sorrow and tears;
Baffled and thwarted you; scoffed and scorned
Your Mistress, sweet Wonder, who tenderly
warned,
And offered her gracious, wise-guiding hand,
To lead us through life's bewildering land—
Back—to this morn of April and Spring,
To these cliffs where the sea and pine boughs
sing;
Where the pain in the hidden room of the heart,
Is brightened, illumined, freed of its smart.

REMORSE

OUT of Life's bleak, gray hours one dream I
bear;
One vivid picture haunts the memory:
A broad, white hilltop with its single tree,
The sole dark object 'gainst a sky made fair
With evening light and winter's wine-red sun—
Suddenly illumining the place,
Uprose the vision of a woman's face;
She and the chastened loveliness were one:
Like the still beauty was her calm control;
The deepening glow like that within her eyes;
And as the single tree marring the whole,
With black'ning branches raised against the sky,
I came and broke her life's sweet purity;
I stayed and let her love me with her soul.

COMPASS-POINTS

NEVER the same can it be,
This world I have known so long;
My compass-points are changed,
And the undertone of my song.

Last year, the sea had an end,
The mountains touched the stars,
The echo gave an answer,
My wildest dreams knew bars:

Neither northward nor southward,
Nor thitherward east or west,
Dare I hinder my soul on her journey,
Or stay her limitless quest.

Away, beyond all borders,
Across the eternal space,
We follow new, timeless music,
And the smile of Her beckoning Face.

RELEASE

WHO'LL say me nay?
Through weary months and years,
Panoplied with fears,
I kept the way.

Love is let loose!
Gone be the truce
Held with my pride
And the world's side!

Thoughts, dreams—the best of me—
Like uncaged birds will flee
Unto thy breast.
Healing with song
All the old wrong;
Fluttering, they cling to thee,
Seeking their nest,
Forever at rest.

BLOSSOM SONGS

I

THE bright-haired Spring comes dancing
Across the wintry world,
A menace in her glancing,
Where yonder clouds lie furled.

Her glad footprints are gleaming
Along the hilltops brown,
The slow brooks know she's coming,
How swift they're trickling down!

The orchard's snowy tangles,
Where robins congregate
Are wrapt in misty rose-light,
And on her presence wait.

II

Who cares if it rain in the spring, in the spring,
When robins and linnets are out on the wing,
In the spring, on the wing?

Who heeds the wind's wail, when 'tis May,
when 'tis May,
The earth one sweet garden for wandering all
day,
When 'tis May all the day?

III

Down in the garden path this dewy night,
From off the hills and meadows young with
 grass,
 New scents blow in, evasive, fragile, sweet,
As Spring herself to-night this way did pass;
 And, all unthinking, face to face, we meet,
Down in the garden path this dewy night.

INSTEAD OF ME

WHEN June has put her perfect kiss
Upon the hillside's dewy cheek,
And every bird note's full of bliss,
As far and wide, the woods you seek—
'Tis solace sweet, since I can't be,
To know you're there instead of me!

When like great spirits bow'd in prayer
Warm clouds poise in the blue beyond,
And insects singing everywhere,
Make the whole world full of sound—
'Tis solace sweet, since I can't be,
To know you're there instead of me!

AN OCTOBER EVENING

GABLED roof and houses tall,
Grapevine trellis, crumbling wall,
Golden-tinted are they all,
This October evening!

And old memories, great and small,
That so often pain recall,
Golden-tinted are they all,
This October evening!

TWILIGHT ON LAKE WABAN

WHEN soft the violet mists o'er Waban
steal,
'Tis then I love to glide across her breast
And watch the twilight quiver in the west,
Or, drift among her shadows till I feel
Their velvet fingers clasp my dripping keel,
Luring me into chambers of deep rest.

Wellesley College, 1890.

HOMESICK

I WOULD fare forth, go once more to the East,
To the dear land that holds my girlhood
dreams;

Would seek the stately, slow meandering
streams

Where green hills rise with hemlocks fledg'd;
would feast

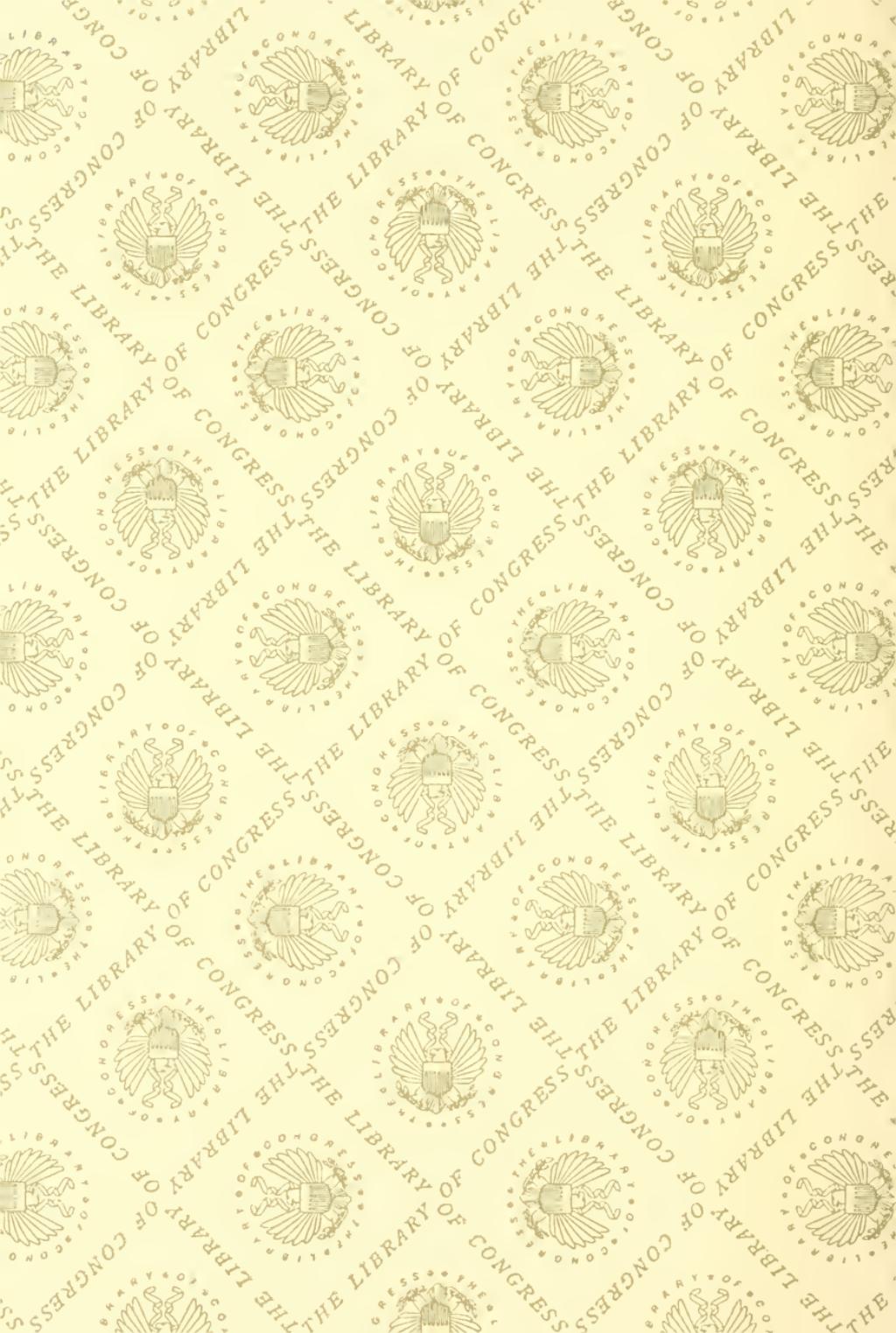
Upon the scent of lilac blooms; shed tears
Within some well-loved sanctuary of trees,
And drink the wine of Memory to the lees—
Memory grown rich by interim of years.

THE HILLSIDE

FAIR Hillside, to thy mute, appealing face,
I bring this utterance as a last farewell.
Grief holds me dumb, yet some poor word
must tell
Thee of my love. Ah! once again, I trace
In these long grasses the same old, sweet grace
That welcomed me in autumns gone. How well
Do I remember what a subtle spell
Bound me for days in wonder at thy base,
Where the bright quince-hedge burned away
the spring
In glory and resplendent flame! White rime
And all the jewels that the frost could fling
Thou held'st for me; and underneath thy Pine
High thoughts have come like angels ministering;
Friendships had birth that scorn the touch of
time!

HERE, THEN, END THE SONNETS AND LYRICS FROM
THE PEN OF NANCY K. FOSTER, WHICH HAVE BEEN
PRINTED ON TUSCANY HANDMADE PAPER AND
MADE INTO A BOOK BY PAUL ELDER AND COMPANY
AT THEIR TOMOYE PRESS, IN THE CITY OF SAN FRAN
CISCO, UNDER THE PERSONAL SUPERVISION OF
RICARDO J. OROZCO IN THE SPRING OF M CM XVII

89





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